PENINSULA FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB INC.
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NEWSLETTER: March 2025

Norway and Sweden - Beyond the Circle & Isostatic Rebound
Heather Ducat February 12, 2025

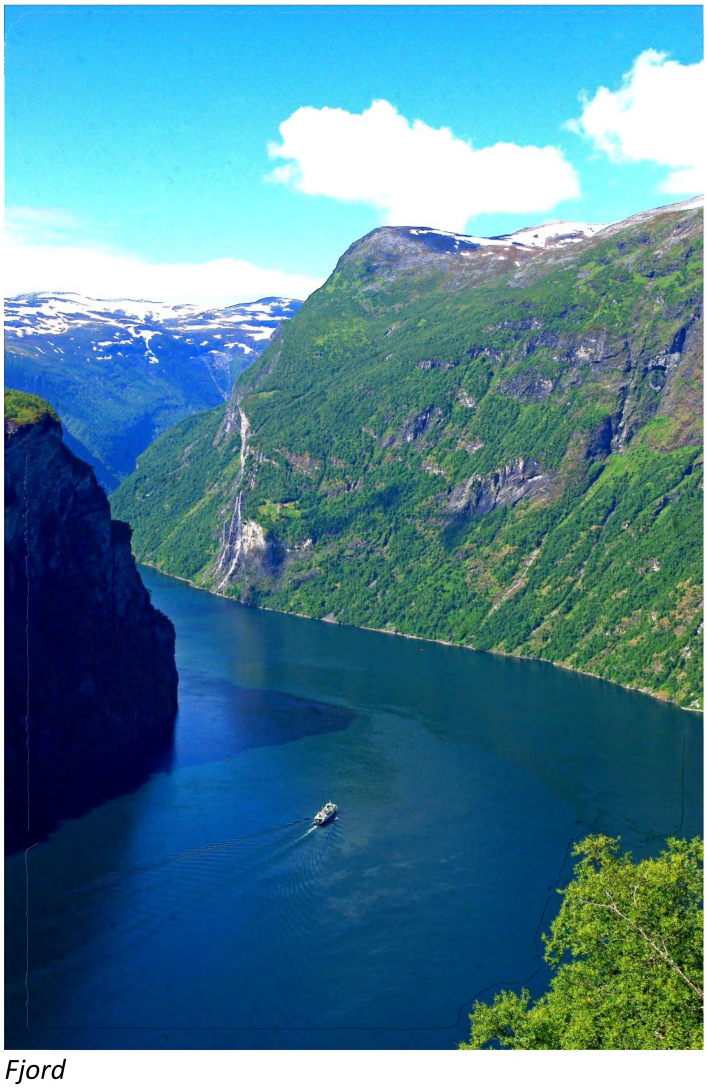
This is Heather's 23rd talk to us, and just as informative and interesting as they have all been.
In the summer of 2014 Heather and Robert drove in a clockwise loop from Southeast Norway north, including as far north as 245k north of the Arctic Circle, then back south along the Baltic coast of Sweden. It was 1040k from Oslo to the northern point of their travels. There were a variety of landscapes- SE Norway is an undulating landscape of farms, rivers and lakes, whereas SW Norway has mountains and remnant icesheet and glaciers, and heathland vegetation, with species such as buttercups, gentians and orchids.

The underlying rock of the Scandinavian Peninsula is 1 billion year old granite, some of it a striking red colour. The Scandinavian Peninsula was uplifted 2.5 million years ago.

Norway's national bird is the White-throated Dipper, which walks and swims underwater, in mountain streams.

The Western Fjords is a World Heritage site, considered the 'Type locality for fjord landscape in the world'. Some of the longest, deepest, narrowest, most spectacular fjords in the world are there. For instance, Sognefjord is 200k long, with 1000m high walls.

The Atlantic Coast is a coastal plain up to 10k wide, with high rainfall from the adjoining mountain range, and thousands of islands and islets. The road is called 'The Road in the Sea', as a lot of it consists of bridges connecting a string of islets. Local residents there build shelters for nesting Eider ducks and collect the down when the females & chicks have finished with the nest and left, a sustainable harmless industry. The Atlantic coast is moderated by the warm Gulf Stream current, with summer temperatures of 14 – 16°. Within 80k of the Arctic Circle are farms, deciduous woodlands and wild lupins. Narvic is a major Norwegian port 220k north of the Arctic Circle that remains ice-free all year. On the high plateau in NW Sweden the vegetation is reduced to mosses, lichens, liverworts and dwarf forest of birch and willow. As they descended to the Baltic coastal plain



Fjord

it changed to forests of Scots Pine and Norway Spruce, home to beaver, mink, otter, lynx and lemming. Bears and wolves are rare.

Atlantic Coast

The High Coast – Gulf of Bothnia (North Baltic) is another World Heritage site- 'An outstanding example of major stages in the Earth's history, including significant, ongoing geological processes and geomorphic features'. This is the site of the post-Ice Age Isostatic Rebound: 20,000 years ago this area was covered with ice 3k thick, which depressed the Earth's crust and semi-fluid mantle. As the ice melted and the weight was reduced, the crust started to rebound. By the time the ice was completely gone 9600 years ago, the crust had already risen 500m. The land is now rising by 80-100cm per century. It is estimated that the land has a further 100-125m to rise and that in another 2000 years a land bridge may connect Sweden and Finland. The islands that were at or just above sea level at the time the ice retreated are now mountain tops at 286m above sea level. This is the world record for the highest isostatic land uplift!

In central and southern Sweden the landscape has thousands of lakes, wetlands and floating bogs, with mixed conifer and deciduous forest (oak, elm, beech, aspen etc). Half of Sweden is covered with forest, native and plantation, and 12% is National Parks and Nature Reserves.

There were 4 species of deer in most of the habitats visited- elk, roe, red and reindeer. Reindeer in the south are wild, and in the north are domesticated, including by the Sami people who herd them.

Text: Judy Smart. Photos by Heather Ducat

Arctic

Red Granite

Waterfall Gully Walk, Seawinds
14th December 2024

Our last excursion for the year saw six members walk the track from Seawinds, near Arthurs Seat, to Kings Falls, rated at 3.1 kilometres each way. The weather was ideal, fine and mild. The walk is undulating, with some quite steep sections, sometimes with stone steps. Like many walks, it seems that the return journey is longer than the outward one. Or could I be getting old? Some parts pass through woodland, there are some grassy sections, and then the view suddenly opens out to a stunning vista of the southern Peninsula. We spotted one kangaroo only—the rest must have been on the lawns at Seawinds. Lots of Common Brown and Varied Sword-grass Brown Butterflies

Highlights of the walk included some Hyacinth Orchids in bud, one starting to flower; a patch of Blue Pincushion (*Brunonia australis*)—maybe 10 to 15 metres square, the largest patch any of us could recall; some Pale Vanilla Lily (*Arthropodium milleflorum*) in flower; sampling the fruits of Prickly Current-bush (*Coprosma quadrifida*)—tiny, but quite sweet—noting that only some of the bushes carried fruit, those being the female plants of this dioecious species.

Birding highlight was undoubtedly a sighting (by some, not me) of a pair of Rufous Fantails. The bird list amounted to 28 species, including Crimson and Eastern Rosellas, Golden and Rufous Whistlers, Brown and Striated Thornbills, Silvereyes, and Yellow-faced and White-eared Honeyeaters. We spent some time trying to locate Satin Flycatchers that we could hear high in the trees, but without success; just when we thought we had spotted them we found we had spotted Eastern Spinebills. An Olive-backed Oriole was calling the whole time, but we never located it. We amused ourselves for a while trying to spot a Common Bronzewing we could hear above us, but not until moving on and looking back did we see it right at the top of the tree; it was still there an hour later on the return journey.

As usual, there was not a gushing waterfall, but we could hear the trickling of water under the ferns, which is more than I have found there many times before. No one had the energy to walk the loop up to Waterfall Gully Road and back, so we contented ourselves with a short walk through the ferny section.

The most notable sighting on the return journey was a large Tiger Snake in the grass beside the track not far below the Seawinds picnic ground. It posed for some photos before cruising away. Velimir showed his photos to two women who had just set out from Seawinds; he felt a bit guilty when they decided against going for a walk and turned back.

Text: Lee Denis. Photos by Sue Brabender: Brunonia australis, Rufous Fantail, Tiger Snake

Dragonfly Hunters

I have mentioned before (well if not here in other forums) about the amazing eyes of dragonflies. They have around 30,000 different eyes making up their two compound eyes that dominate their heads as you can see in the head shot of a Tau Emerald.
This is part of why they are so successful as hunters. Nearly 95% of strikes end up with a meal. Compare that with lions at about 25%!
The other main reason is that they can move their four wings independently, enabling reverse and upside-down flight if needed. They can also accelerate like an electric car, reaching close to 50km/hr from a static hover!
This fascinating info came from a book called Extraordinary Insects, by Anne Sverdrup-Thygeson.
Tau Emeralds are common dragonflies at home here in Mt Eliza.

Text & Photos by Rog Standen

Birding Reports

Langwarrin Flora & Fauna Reserve
2nd December 2024

As we have been doing for a number of years, our final birding for 2024 was at Langwarrin. Seven regulars and two visitors assembled on a very warm morning that progressed to a hot, sunny day.
With the good rain of the last few weeks the vegetation looks nice and fresh. We know just where to look along the SEC
Break to find Horned and Onion Orchids in flower and numerous Sun Orchids, past their prime.
Lee managed to track down a Satin Flycatcher in a similar location to last year and we had a lovely view of a Yellow Robin on its nest only about 3m. above the ground. Rufous and Golden Whistlers were in fine voice and we also heard a Sacred Kingfisher, Shining Bronze and Fantail Cuckoos. Our total for the day was 29 species
Text by Heather Ducat

Mushroom Reef, Flinders
3rd February 2025

Our first birding outing for the year saw us at Mushroom Reef Reserve, Flinders, on a very windy but fine and sunny day. The tide was high when we arrived so the reef was underwater, except for the highest rocky outcrops. Our first bird sighting was of a lone Gannet cruising along close to the beach, suddenly giving us a close-up exhibition of diving. A cluster of birds on the beach was resolved on closer inspection to consists of Silver Gulls, Chestnut Teal and two Kelp Gulls. The rocks out further were roosting sites for more Silver Gulls, Little Pied Cormorants and a couple of Crested Terns. To the south the rocky point was well populated with Great Cormorants and White-faced Herons. A dozen or more White Ibis were feeding in the washed-up seagrass on the beach, while Sooty Oystercatchers hunted in the shallow water between the beach and the rocks. An Australian Kestrel hovered in the updraft above the cliff.

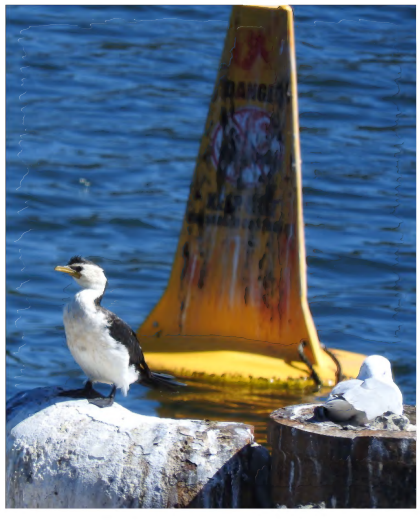
Also on the beach were numerous Willie Wagtails and a large flock of Starlings. The rest of the sightings were bush birds including Singing and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters, Silvereyes, Grey Fantails, Brown Thornbills and a Magpie Lark – most of these appearing during our lunch break.

A bid to seek out waders or plovers around the northern point towards West Head were defeated by the strong wind, much worse than the section near the main reef. A side trip to Somers Beach was equally fruitless. On the way home three of us stopped off at Balbirooroo wetland in Balnarring – very few birds were seen there, but we did spot a Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike.
Text & Photos by Lee Denis: Kelp Gull, Sooty Oystercatcher.

Frankston Natural Features Reserve
3rd March 2025

Birds have been very quiet everywhere we've been over this hot dry summer, and Frankston NFR proved no exception. Although quiet, bush birds appeared eventually—most of the usual suspects, but, apart from Grey Fantails, not in great numbers. There weren't many birds on the water either, just small numbers of Coots and Silver Gulls, with a few Little Pied Cormorants and, on the far side from the dam wall, a pair of Musk Ducks.

A walk along the Kookaburra circuit didn't add much—more Grey Fantails, but one interesting observation was a large patch of whitewash and a couple of pellets with bone protruding from them. Most likely signs of a Powerful Owl. On re-crossing the dam wall we noted that a few more birds had appeared, including Hardheads and a White-faced Heron. Our final count came to 34 species, which seemed a reasonable result considering how quiet it was.
Text & Photo of Little Pied Cormorant by Lee Denis



Blustery Western Treatment Plant
15th February 2025

A small but dedicated carload of our Peninsula Field Naturalist members ventured out in the blustery and showery weather in mid-February to see what we could find at the Western Treatment Plant at Werribee. As is often the case, we started looking at every bird to check for identification, but it soon became clear that we needed to quicken the pace, or we would not get to the places we wanted to.

“Good weather for ducks” I hear someone say, and it was indeed. I've never seen so many blue-billed ducks in one place in my life. It was fantastic to see so many of them tucked into the northern corner of Lake Borrie. These were one of nine duck species for the day, out of a total of 70 birds all up. Not a bad day considering the weather.

We appreciated great views of the small waders, red-necked stint, sharpies and curlew sandpipers, often together which helped explain the IDs to a relative newcomer. A lovely group of seven brolgas also attracted our attention for a while. Always a great bird to see.

Time management was spot on as when we stopped for a lunch break in the hide, the sun was shining. But despite a solid roof, the horizontal rain that came down in a downpour while we were in there made it through the cracks and still got some of us a bit damp! When we emerged, the rain had gone, and you'd have not known it had rained! However, birding from the hide was virtually a non-event, as the wind was so strong it had moved enough water across the bay for it to appear to be high tide, though that was five or six hours away!

Great egrets were generally sheltering from the wind, as were large flocks of white-faced herons and royal spoonbills, but a single little egret gave a terrific performance showing off all its running, jumping and dancing tricks to entice prey to show themselves.

As the list of people’s desired species got mown down, a pipit was next on the list, having had brolga (nine) and great views of a red-kneed dotterel and others, but the driver was daydreaming and drove past two next to the road which got up and flew away before a positive ID could be made (sorry Lee). The unexpected can also be high on people’s options for bird of the day, like the pair of zebra finches seen late in the afternoon. While there were good numbers of raptors (six species), bush birds were hard to find (only one parrot and two honeyeaters).

All in all, we had a great day despite the weather. Being in the car for most of the time makes it workable there even in inclement weather.

Oh, and we didn't see the vagrant eastern yellow wagtail that it seems everyone else there was searching for.

Text & Photos by Rog Standen:Little Egret, Zebra Finches, Red-kneed Dotterel, Australasian Grebe, family of Pacific Black Ducks. Fairy Martins photo by Lee Denis

Wasp-mimic bee

In November 2022 a (black) wasp made a hollow in the mortar between bricks behind the controller for our solar panels, sealed it up with food and egg inside and went on its way. The subsequent youngster scraped its way out to enter the wide world, leaving a cavity for others to use.

On Tuesday last week I saw what I thought was another wasp exploring the hole. It turns out the twist here was that it was a Common Wasp-mimic Bee (*Hyleoides concinna*)! Something else I have never seen before.

Interestingly, it searches for holes to nest in and while building supplies for her young to feed on, she makes a cover at the entrance made with a cellophane-like substance that draws in at the centre and is flexible so she can move through it, and it closes after her.
When she has built enough supplies, she lays her egg and completes a mud-covered entrance to seal it off and her young need to scratch their way out the same as the wasp young had to do.

Some annoying Argentine ants were causing her some grief around the entrance, as they forced the wasp-mimic bee to fly away several times while I was watching because they nipped her on the feet. However, she persevered and completed the ‘door’. Like most native bees, this lives a solitary life.

Text & photos by Rog Standen
left: the Wasp-mimic bee with an Argentine ant paying too much attention.
centre: the bee enters the hole to presumably take in more feed.
right: the celaphane like cover, or door, that the bee covers the entrance to the hole with.

Contact Us

Peninsula Field Naturalists Club Inc
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Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month with a field trip on the following Satur-day. Visitors always welcome.
We also go birding on the first Monday of the month. Further information and current Program of Activities can be found at our website:
www.peninsulafieldnaturalists.org.au

We are also on Face book: **Peninsula Field Nats**

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